

Test False Preachers

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Bible Text: 1 John 4:1-6

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If you would look with me in your Bibles to 1 John chapter four and I want to read the first six verses of this chapter and talk with you about the test for false preachers.

Here in this chapter we have the apostle John warning against what he calls evil and seducing spirits and he is not talking about voodoo sessions like you think of when you think of evil spirits or some third world country where people are given over to outward satanic type worship, but he is talking here about the spirit of antichrist that is ever prevalent in the world in Christendom even as we read in the chapter in Peter. Peter warned of false prophets, false teachers among you. And as I have often said the best counterfeit is that which is closest to the truth, that without the particular test that we are given here in the Word of God many are deceived and don't see it.

In fact, if you try to warn them, they will likely get upset with you, thinking that you are being too narrow or too particular. But we want to be as particular as the Word because this is the Spirit's Word. He inspired this Word and it takes his Spirit to teach us.

But you can see with what tenderness John writes these that know the Lord. He says, "Beloved." So he is writing to those who are beloved of God, chosen of him, redeemed by Christ and taught of the Spirit.

Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that [notice "spirit" is in italics] this is that... of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.

Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. We are of

God: he that knoweth God heareth us; he that is not of God heareth not us.
Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.¹

So we can see here the need for discernment.

It is interesting. In the original the way you could read this would be, “Beloved,” in verse one, “stop believing every Spirit.”

There evidently had become in the congregations of the day an openness, a readiness to receive anybody that pronounced the name of Christ. And there wasn't a true discerning of truth and error. A lot of false business, false work is done in the name of Christ. We know that because Christ himself said, “In the day of judgment many shall say in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied thy name, have we not done many mighty works in thy name, have we not cast out demons in thy name?’”

And Christ will say, “Depart from me ye workers of iniquity. I never knew you.”

The Lord knows those that are his, but here in verse one the word “spirit” is really speaking of a man who claims to be endowed with the gift of the Spirit either to hold an office, you know, that word is used very loosely today. When we were on the cruise Bobby Bowden was there speaking and the book that he was promoting was entitled *Called to Coach*. And his full emphasis was the fact that he felt that he was called of God to do the coaching that he did.

I would agree in the sense that that is why God put him on this earth. Otherwise he wouldn't have done what he did. But the more he talked, the more I realized that he had no sense at all of what true salvation is. He had been brought up in an organization that was taught to say a prayer and if you say this prayer and repeat it after the witness that is leading you in it or the evangelist, so-called, that you were as sure of heaven as your own name. That is not the Spirit of Christ. It is not the salvation that is set forth in the Scriptures. It is not what we do. It is what Christ has done.

So the call here is to beware of those who come in the name of Christ, believe that they are anointed or endowed with that Spirit to be a preacher or a teacher and, you know, some that are... I should say as we know not all who claim to be of Christ or for Christ are sent of him. So we need discernment. This is not anything new. There were false teachers among Israel. There are false teachers... there were false teachers in the days of the apostles and there are false teachers today.

We already read 2 Peter chapter two verses one through three that warn us, but look at 2 Corinthians chapter 11 and verses 13 through 15.

What John is doing here is not any different than the way we as parents would warn our children when they are out and about or where we might even... our spouse, you know, if we know they are going to be out and about warn them to be a little bit more vigilant,

¹ 1 John 4:1-6.

careful, watch about you. You know, until you have an experience or heard of somebody having an experience that was caught unawares, it may not mean that much to some people. They might just slough it off and say, “Oh, that is... you are just being overly cautious.”

But the more you hear news the more you hear about how people are taken and hurt. Their whole lives changed, some murdered at a time when they were caught unawares. When you hear of that, then you become more sensitive because these are people that to look at them they just look like they would be the nicest people around, kind, good neighbors. You hear people talking about this all the time and yet serial killers.

This past week I was appalled to hear about a man that had been married to his one wife of x number of years and yet just arrested for having killed over 28 other women. And here he shared this house with this woman and she was totally oblivious, totally unaware that he was a serial killer.

If these are things that are true in temporal, in physical things, how much more in spiritual things and, you know, may the Lord grant us discernment.

In 2 Corinthians 11 beginning with verse 13 down to verse 15 Paul says:

“For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.”²

So they appear to be apostles of Christ by what they say, how they behave. Again, getting as close to the truth as possible and yet all the while deceived.

And Paul says in verse 14:

And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers [notice] of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.³

So it all boils down to this one thing and that is how can a sinner be just before a holy God? These false preachers are not going to appear in the pulpit like you imagine the devil with pitchfork and horns, you know, flame coming out of their mouths. They are men and have to say even women today who talk of a righteousness. There is a certain measure of morality that is preached on. You know, they are not out there encouraging people to go out and live loosely. In fact, to hear them when people are done they will say, “That was a good message.” Or, “This man is a good man.” That is how they will characterize them.

² 2 Corinthians 11:13.

³ 2 Corinthians 11:14-15.

But such are ones that Paul calls here false preachers. They claim to be holy and they want you to have that opinion of them that they are holy, that their mindset is always on things of God and they purport to speak for God.

I was at a luncheon yesterday where one of these came in and he was obviously making it apparent because he dressed differently. He wore the garb. I have never had anybody come up to me in a business world and say, "Are you a preacher," based upon how I dress, because I dress just like everybody else. Put on a business suit and deal with the business world.

But this man had his collar turned around backward and it was interesting to me we had two lines going down the lunch line that people were coming up to him and grabbing his hand and some even taking it and putting it up to their forehead and then leaning in to tell him certain things and then he would nod his head and make the sign of the cross and, you know, bless them. And they would all kind of back out with respect, you know, saying, "You know, bless me, my father, thank you. Bless me."

You know Scripture says, "Call no man father. Call no man master in this world."

And people love to have that sort of honor and respect among men. But no matter what other men think of them we are to try the spirits. We are to test all those that claim to be in some fashion leaders among men, representing God.

So how do we do that? Coming back here to 1 John chapter four I would say, first of all, in verse two they are to be tried by the Word.

You know, we are not to just come up with a set of rules to decide who is and who isn't, but this Word that we hold in our hand is to be the absolute litmus test. If a man in what he professes and what he says does not line up with what this Word teaches, then he is antichrist.

You say, "How can you say that?"

Well, what is this Word all about, but to set Christ forth? This Word that we hold in our hands is not a book to teach us of rituals or of ceremonies or to be used in any way to put men into doing, setting men to doing certain things in order to obtain their salvation. It is all about Christ. And if you look in Acts chapter 17, for example, and verse 11 we are given this instruction.

You know, if anybody has a question about what a man preaches, then let's go to the Word. What is he saying? What is his message? Don't be taken aback by how stately he may appear behind the pulpit or how many years he proclaims to have been in the ministry, so-called. But what about the Word?

We find in Acts 17 and verse 11 it says, “ These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”⁴

Now who were they testing? They were testing Paul. They were testing Silas. We see that in the context in verse 10. And we don’t find Paul or Silas becoming upset because these that heard them said, “Ok, we have heard you, but now let’s look at this in the Word. Let’s see whether these things be so.”

I truly believe that every disagreement among men with regard to Christ and his gospel should be settled with this Word, but how little will men take the time to sit down together and come now and let us reason together, prayerfully take a look at what the Scriptures have to say.

Typically what happens is this forms a group over there. This one forms a group over here. But it says “They received the word with all readiness of mind and searched the scriptures daily whether those things were so.”⁵

I remember as the Lord first began to work in my heart and I started asking some preachers, “Well, how do you tell what book is a good book and what isn’t?” And I remember one preacher giving me this one litmus test. He said, “Whatever author that constantly takes you back to the Word and not just quoting it, but takes you back and breaks it down and shows you from the Word what they are setting forth, that is an author worth giving some consideration to.”

If it is just a matter of writing on a subject and you spend your time looking at the writer’s words rather than looking at the Scriptures, then there is something wrong.

I can remember when the book *Sovereignty of God* was put in my hands for the first time. That is what impressed me about the way the author wrote it. It was just constantly going back to this Scripture and that. I found myself having a difficult time getting through the book, his book, because I was constantly over here reading these Scriptures. And I wondered how it had been that for years I had missed it, you see.

So the Word is vital.

Over in Isaiah chapter eight and verses 19 and 20 we have this given again.

And when they shall say unto you, Seek unto them that have familiar spirits, and unto wizards that peep, and that mutter: should not a people seek unto their God? for the living to the dead? To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.⁶

⁴ Acts 17:11.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Isaiah 8:19-20.

And so we have a very good source that we are called upon to weigh prayerfully and that is the inspired Word of God. This Word will expose most of what is out there. And don't be deceived even by the fact that they stand up and read the Word, because natural men and natural minds can read this Word from a perspective that when they are done interpreting it you get the impression that salvation is of man and that there is a human righteousness that needs to be worked out. They will preach. They will use this same word to preach up a life of the law and works. They will even come to this Word and preach the advocacy of Mary and the saints, in other words, those that have gone before, the need to pray to them. They will preach up sabbath keeping. They will preach up rituals. They will preach up so-called holy days. They will preach up infant salvation, all manners of tradition, you know, because people don't take the time to really read.

When I listen to a preacher and I am never to do this myself. Sometimes we get in a hurry. We will tell the people, "Don't bother looking. Let me just... let me just give you the reference."

Well, what are we doing? We are putting our commentary, we are putting the importance of what we have to say above the Word.

I think that whenever we quote a particular portion of Scripture that we ought to encourage those listening to us to turn to it and to read it for several reasons. One is that all the while you feel led of the Lord to point out a certain point in that verse, if someone sitting there listening to you is of the Lord, the Lord may be pleased to teach them something that you haven't seen, you know? I am afraid there is the sense that—and this even among so-called sovereign grace preachers—that that preacher's word is God's truth. And if you ever question them, that is how they will come back to you. You know, are you questioning me? Do you know how long I have been preaching?

Kind of like what the Pharisees said to the blind men that the Lord had healed. Do you teach us? There is a pride there.

I personally am blessed many times at the end of a message when, you know, I have directed you to a particular portion of Scripture, but afterward you will come up and say, "You know, while you were preaching here my eyes fell on this verse over here that I had never seen before but it really confirms what you are saying."

You know, that is a blessing. Because the same Spirit, if you are the Lord's, the same Spirit that inspired this Word that is in the sermon the Lord is preaching is also in his people. And it is together that we come to see more clearly and plainly the Word. But if you hear a man preaching up man, preaching up free will, preaching up traditions, preaching up law, preaching up works and not preaching up Christ, then that man is blind and does not rightly divide the Word of truth as Paul says we should do.

So John here in 1 John points out to us how it is that we can know the Spirit of God in verse two.

“Hereby know ye the Spirit [capital S] Spirit of God.”⁷ It says, “Every spirit [little s] that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.”⁸

Now what he is saying then is that the very object of true faith is Christ. Sure you can find a lot about law and works and ceremonies and rituals here in this Word, but if you miss that the fact that all of those were but types and pictures of God’s holiness and that Christ came and fulfilled it, then you have missed it. That is what it means here when it says, “Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh...”⁹

It is not just a matter of believing that he came as a man. Most religions in the world even Islam believes that there was a man called Jesus that came in the flesh. Just to say that that is all that that means is to miss it here.

When it says the he is come, number one, we conclude that he was. He already was. He came. You know, we don’t speak of our children... Sometimes when I say it came into the world, but we don’t really speak that way. It is they were born. And when you say that there was a conception and there was a period of time in the womb and they they were born. But here in speaking of Christ it says that he is come.

So it supposes, presupposes that he was before already in existence before he came and one with the Father and coeternal. He is very God of very God.

In Isaiah chapter nine and verse six, if you go back there and look with me in Isaiah nine and verse six, look how the Scriptures put this. And to me this is the beauty of reading the Word and just having the Word opened to our heart. It speaks here in this several hundred years before Christ came into this world, but it says:

“For unto us a child is born.”¹⁰

That is how it referred to human flesh. But look at the second part.

“Unto us a son is given.”¹¹

That is his deity. You know, a Son is given to us in this child that was born in the flesh. He is none other than the God man. So in a very simple fashion he wasn’t made to be the Son of God, he was declared to be the Son of God. He always has been the Son of God from eternity, one with the Father. But he came into this world in a body as a man.

All right. So secondly Jesus Christ is come, but also it says there in 1 John four and verse two that he came in the flesh. So it means that Christ being God, putting on flesh became

⁷ 1 John 4:2.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ ibid.

¹⁰ Isaiah 9:6.

¹¹ Ibid.

a real man. . As much as we contend for the fact that Christ is God, we contend just as strongly that he is a man. There is a man today in glory. And he took on that flesh. Scriptures say that he became of the same nature with us that we might become our brother.

If you look in Hebrews chapter two, again, this is... we don't have to go to a Bible commentary to understand this. Look how plainly and simply it is set forth here in the Scriptures in Hebrews two and verse 14.

“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same.”¹²

In other words, “A body hast thou prepared for him.”

It was prepared in that it was sinless. It didn't come through Adam's seed, but nonetheless, a body, every bit as human as when God made Adam, took of the dust of the ground and formed Adam and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Christ was made a fetus. He was made to be a man by the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Creation out of nothing just like Adam. He was not born of a, you know, of union between a man and a woman. His seed.... he was called the seed of the woman. The seed was put within the woman, a virgin in order that he should come forth into this world, but, nonetheless, every bit a man. And it gives us the reason here in verse 14 of Hebrews to.

“...that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.”¹³

God cannot die. But a man can. He had flesh and blood and so it was necessary that he lay down his life as a ransom in order to redeem and to justify those that the Father had given him.

So to deny his humanness, like some do... There are some you talk to, they want to in some way minimize the fact that that body that hung on that tree and that gave up the ghost was something less than a man. You know, he would not have... he was a perfect man. His body was without sin and corruption and had he not given up his spirit in death, he would have lived forever as a man. There was nothing. Just like Satan had nothing in him, death had nothing in him.

Death has everything in us. There is... we are born in this world as sinners. He came into this world sinless, but, nonetheless, wholly a man.

And then, thirdly, in 1 John chapter four by saying that he came it is not enough just to say that he came, but why he came. You know, what did he come to do? It begs that question.

¹² Hebrews 2:14.

¹³ Ibid.

You know, if you were to say to somebody, “So and so came over to see me yesterday,” and that is all you said, what does that beg as far as a question in the other person’s mind listening to you? Well, why did he come? What did he have to say? What was his purpose? And the same is true here in 1 John four and verse two.

“Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.”¹⁴

What is the very first question? Why did he have to come? And in coming what did he do and what did he accomplish?

There, again, if we are discerning as far as the Word is concerned and the Word is our foundation. It is the very source of all that we know concerning God in Christ, then we look to the Word to teach us that.

We are not just going to say to people, “Well, do you believe that Christ came into this world?”

“Yeah, I believe.”

“All right, well, then you are saved.”

No. Why? Who is he? Why did he come? What did he accomplish? Where is he now?

In Matthew chapter one verse 21—and this is where when you begin to compare Scripture with Scripture you can piece together Christ’s mission. Why did he come? This was the message of the apostles.

Matthew chapter one and verse 21, “And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.”¹⁵

So with every declaration there is an explanation in Scripture, particularly with regard to Christ. Why call his name Jesus which means God saves? Well, “He shall save his people from their sins.”¹⁶

It talks about who does the saving, Jesus. It talks about who he saves, his people. And it talks about from what he saves them. If you are saved you are saved from something. Right here, from their sins, from the curse and from the power in God’s time from the very presence of sin.

So all of this is summed up in what we are reading here in 1 John 4:2.

“Every spirit that confesseth...”¹⁷

¹⁴ 1 John 4:2.

¹⁵ Matthew 1:21.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ 1 John 4:2.

This means this is our confession. When people ask, “What is your confession of faith? You know, do you hold to this Baptist confession or that Baptist confession?”

Neither. You know, our confession is that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, who he is and why he came, what he accomplished, for whom he did and where is he now.

When you stay focused on that it avoids an awful lot of discussion in other areas, what people want to know. You know, well, do you pray standing up? Do you pray sitting down? A couple of years ago I was taken to task because someone asked if we stood to read the Word. And I said, “No, we sit. You know, the person reading stands, but we sit.”

Well, that is unbiblical. You are not showing respect for the Word because in Scripture they stood to read.

Well, you know, it doesn't come down to a matter of the position of the body when the Word is being read, but it is the position of the heart. Is the heart bowed, you know? Are we like these Bereans that received the Word with gladness? That is what is important. It doesn't... that is not important whether we are standing or sitting.

But people make big deals of these things. They will split over them, you know? And groups that say, “Well,” you know, they have asked, “When you baptize, do you dunk the person three times?”

Well, there is the three dunkers and there is the one dunker. But, you know, what does that have to do with testing the spirits, whether every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God.

You know, we see people departing all the time from the faith by getting caught up with some of these other matters and not holding to what is vital. To depart from Christ, to depart from what these Scriptures have to say about who he is, to depart from his effectual death and what he accomplished that substitutionary work is ultimately to depart from the faith, because Christ is the object of faith.

If you look over in Hebrews chapter 10 and verses 11 through 18, this is what we are called to consider and I would leave this with you. And we will come back to this again. Our time is about gone, but we test the spirits based upon the Word. We test the spirits based upon what a man has to say of Christ.

And here is the sum of it in Hebrews chapter 10.

In verse 11 it says, “And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.”¹⁸

¹⁸ Hebrews 10:11.

Just stop there and think a little bit about all the ceremony that went on in the Old Testament, the priest standing there, actually taking those sacrifices and offering them and applying them day in and day out, day in and day out. But none of that could take away sin.

That is what I think of when I see some of this that is going on today in organizations where they are trying to go back and imitate the Old Testament priests and how they dressed and the incense and, you know, you just want to stand up and say, “You know what? None of that took away sin back in the day and your trying to imitate it today isn’t going to take away sin.”

But they are blind. They don’t see that. They think they are honoring God in this.

But, no. Notice in verse 12. Here is what I mean getting back to the point.

“But this man...”¹⁹

That is a strong statement right there.

“But this man after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God.”²⁰

Let’s talk about that. Let’s don’t talk about priests and how they dress. Let’s don’t talk about why they take that incense and whip it around and try to sanctify a so-called altar and have people standing up and sitting down and doing all of this stuff. Let’s... what about this man who by his one sacrifice put away sin forever? How do you understand that? How do you see that?

You know, that forces people to consider the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is why we confess that Christ has come in the flesh, because of what he accomplished.

And verse 13.

“From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.”²¹

These are astounding verses.

“For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.”²²

Those that were set apart in him by one offering, he hath perfected forever. That is the sum of our hope. That is the sum of our salvation is that when he died, he died for me.

¹⁹ Hebrews 10:12.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Hebrews 10:13.

²² Hebrews 10:14.

When he died I was put on that cross. I was put in that grave. I rose with him. I ascended on high in this one man.

That is the answer when people say, “Why don’t you do all this fanfare and ceremony when you come together for worship?”

“For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost...”²³

The Holy Spirit, see, that is where this discernment comes from. It is the Word, but it is the Spirit, the very Spirit of Christ.

....also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.²⁴

To me that shows that the cross was vital. You know, sure, God knows the beginning from the end. He knows those that are his. He knows those that he chose, but the Scriptures clearly state that when he died, God said, “Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.”²⁵

There was a time when that sin had to be put away in order for God to be just and justify.

Is it important, then, for us to hold to and believe that we were justified there at the cross, not before, not after? Absolutely, according to Scriptures, because it says, verse 18:

“Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.”²⁶

The sacrifice has ceased.

So may the Lord grant us discernment. We will come back here in 1 John four again next time, but I know for myself I am greatly helped in reading portions of Scripture like this and asking the Lord constantly not to be pulled off center, but to look to Christ alone.

²³ Hebrews 10:14-15.

²⁴ Hebrews 10:15-17.

²⁵ Hebrews 10:17.

²⁶ Hebrews 10:18.